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ABSTRACT

Most states have already implemented policies to recruit, select, and retain better teachers. The majority of these policies raise standards for entry or recertification. Another approach provides incentives to attract qualified college graduates into teaching. Offering scholarships in exchange for five-year teaching commitments and offering low-interest loans to qualified education majors are among the most popular incentives. Rural and urban school districts have discovered they must offer higher salaries to enlarge the pool of qualified applicants. To induce teachers to stay in the classrooms, some states have utilized differential pay, merit pay, state-mandated evaluations that are implemented appropriately, and career ladders for teachers. Given the projected enrollment increases and increased demands for teachers during the next 15 to 20 years, both types of policies--standards and incentives--must be developed to insure the presence of good teachers in the classroom. (MLF)

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23. State Policies To Screen And Attract Teachers

The Issue

As state policy makers across the country search for ways to restore confidence in the public school system, one issue they are addressing is the quality of instruction. Since the most important variable in classroom teaching is the teacher, states have begun a thorough reevaluation of their policies for recruiting, selecting and retaining teachers. This effort is taking place at a time when recent studies have found that college graduates who are the most academically able either do not enter the teaching profession, or are the most likely to leave it.

Context

The Past. Between 1950 and 1970, the teaching workforce increased by 48% as children born in the post-war baby boom moved through the school system. Most of the large numbers of teachers who entered the profession in these years were recently trained rather than experienced. Most were college graduates, since states had by then made the bachelor's degree a minimum requirement for teaching. The result was that, to a much greater extent than before 1950, teaching began to compete with other professions for college graduates. What little systematic information there is on retention during this period indicates that a

disproportionate number of teachers who left teaching were women of higher measured intelligence, whereas those who continued to teach were of lower intelligence. Later studies found a similar trend for minority teachers.

Since 1970, two trends have been dominant. First, the supply of teachers is shrinking. Declining student enrollment and an oversupply of new teachers caused enrollments in teacher education programs to drop nearly 50% between 1972 and 1980. Second, new teachers continue to have the lowest academic test scores of all college majors. (Although the relative importance of academic ability in teaching has been widely debated, this type of ability has always been considered a major criterion.) These national findings were confirmed in North Carolina by Vance and Schlechty (1982).

The Present Outlook. The supply of new teachers is down. Fewer students are attending colleges than in the past and substantially fewer are majoring in education. (For a more detailed treatment of teacher shortages, see Issuegram #24, Teacher Shortages in the Next Decade.) Further, the quality of those entering the teaching profession has been questioned. Several reasons have been offered to explain the decline. The first relates to the changing role of women in American society. Put simply, fewer women feel the need to take advantage of a teaching schedule. Second has been the effectiveness of affirmative action efforts, which have provided capable women and minority candidates with attractive career options other than education. A third reason has been the expansion of the human services sector of the economy. People who wish to serve other people now have more and broader employment opportunities than before. Therefore, even if the supply of teachers rises to meet the demand, it is likely that the overall quality of new teachers will probably be lower than in the past.

Current State Policies

To raise teacher quality, states have tightened entry requirements, mandated evaluations and expanded preservice training. They have chosen a regulatory approach because they have used it historically to establish credentials for a variety of professions and because it tends to be less expensive than other approaches: raising the cutoff point on a particular test from the 50th percentile to the 75th percentile, for example, is inexpensive to implement. What is not clear, however, is whether these regulatory policies will substantially improve the quality of new teachers. The likelihood appears low for two reasons. First, implementing such policies may be a problem, especially in the areas of evaluation and preservice training. Second, an approach that

is strictly regulatory is a one-sided approach. If teaching is increasingly less attractive to young college graduates, then raising standards and restricting entry into the profession are not likely to make it more attractive. Many people now argue that public policy must not only set higher standards but also **provide incentives** that will allow teaching to compete successfully for college graduates.

What we have, then, are two different approaches to the problem of raising teacher quality. The first approach eliminates unqualified candidates through "screening." Screening is inexpensive, but its short-term impact on teacher quality will probably be marginal because of the time it takes for undergraduates to become teachers. The second approach provides incentives -- "magnets" -- to attract qualified college graduates into teaching. Incentive programs are more difficult to administer and more expensive.

Stricter Standards--The Notion of Screening

Recruitment. Twenty-two states have raised or are seriously considering raising the grade point averages that high school graduates must have to enter teacher education programs and the scores they must make on college entrance tests. (Although many of these 22 states are southern states, the rest are located in every region of the country.) Another screen that states have imposed is to require that students complete a series of approved education courses before they can be certified. Unless students are education majors, qualifying for certification demands extensive (and expensive) extra preparation.

Selection. States have regulated the certification of teachers for many years. Every state requires prospective teachers to complete an approved program with required courses, and approximately 35 states impose at least some of the requirements themselves. (In the remaining states, institutions of higher education approve programs.) Twenty-three states currently have or are seriously considering imposing state-wide teacher tests; seven states require that prospective teachers have college grade point averages above a certain minimum before they can be certified. A few states require teaching practicums or internships that often involve extensive evaluation. In Oklahoma, for example, interns must be evaluated by the principal, a teacher and a faculty member from the teacher training institution. In practice, unfortunately, people do not always take evaluation requirements seriously and do not always do a good job of providing feedback to the prospective teacher. Further, states have given school districts little guidance on hiring new teachers, although most have

established minimum-salary schedules that all districts must follow.

Retention. States have imposed few screening policies to retain qualified teachers. One exception has been the state-wide salary schedule. Every state-wide salary schedule is explicitly linked to teaching experience and additional coursework, which has meant that the only other way for teachers to earn more money has been to leave the classroom for an administrative role. Recently a number of states have increased the requirements for recertification, a process in which evalution again plays an important part. North Carolina school districts must prepare individualized professional development plans for every teacher. Their use of these plans in the evaluation of teachers could lead to substantial improvement in the quality of teaching in North Carolina, but it could also have no effect at all, depending upon the quality of the evaluation.

Incentives for Teachers -- The Notion of Magnets

Recruitment. A number of states have tried to lure better-qualified students into schools of education. Two of the most popular methods are offering scholarships in exchange for five-year teaching commitments (a program similar in concept to the Reserve Officers Training Corps) and offering low-interest loans to qualified education majors (Kentucky and Louisiana have programs of these sorts). Revamping the education school curriculum to make it more attractive to students has received some attention at the state policy making level, but most of the interest in curriculum revision has come from schools of education.

Selection. Two incentive systems are already in place, one imposed by states and the other beyond the states' control. Statewide salary schedules set starting salaries for new teachers that are somewhat higher than beginning salaries in other professions. Beyond the control of the state is the relative appeal of certain school districts. For the most part teachers prefer to work in suburban school districts, which often means that rural and urban districts must offer higher salaries -- sometimes much higher -- to enlarge the pool of qualified candidates.

Retention. On the whole, states and school districts have seemed reluctant to offer teachers incentives to stay in the classroom. One policy that has been used, however, is differential pay. Teachers have been offered more pay for teaching different subject areas, teaching at different types of schools or attending in-service programs. "Meritorious teaching performance" has also been rewarded. Many school

districts have tried at least one of these approaches; the city of Houston uses them all. The problem with pay differentials is that they generally provide only a one-time incentive. Once someone is rewarded for teaching in a subject area, teaching in a particular type of school, or taking in-service training, the system provides no other incentives. "Merit pay" incentives are somewhat different, since teachers are at least theoretically eligible for more than one pay increase. However, for a variety of reasons, there would be great pressure to spread increases among as many teachers as possible, which would make merit pay more or less a one-time increase. Also problematic is defining what constitutes meritorious teaching.

Although the idea of state-mandated evaluations often carries negative connotations, well-structured evalutions that are implemented appropriately can help answer the question teachers often ask themselves, "How am I doing?" Good evaluation procedures can foster interaction with peers, which makes evaluation less threatening and begins to break down the isolation classroom teachers sometimes feel. For evaluations to be successful, all those involved in the process must commit time and resources.

A "career ladder" for teachers joins pay differentials to a series of evaluations. At the present time both the Charlotte-Mecklenberg (N.C.) school district and the state of Tennessee are considering career ladders for teachers. Making career ladders work will require restructuring the relationship between teachers, administrators and school boards, especially since cooperation between these groups is essential. Nonetheless, career ladders are certainly important to consider as an incentive.

Conclusion

Given the three national trends that are changing elementary and secondary education -- higher student enrollment starting in the mid-eighties, the decline in the attractiveness of the teaching profession especially among bright young women and minorities, and the decline in test scores of people who become teachers -- it is important for states to consider ways to offset these trends. Strategies to improve the quality of teaching fit in well with the overall school improvement movement. Most states have already implemented policies to recruit, select and retain better teachers. The majority of these policies raise standards for entry into the profession or for recertification. But stricter standards will not make teaching more attractive to those who at the present time are not considering it as a career. This is especially unfortunate given the projected enrollment

increases and increased demands for teachers during the next 15 to 20 years. Policies that provide incentives for teachers are only now being considered. Adopting these policies is likely to be difficult, since they will be expensive to carry out and they will likely restructure the relationship between teacher organizations and school districts. However, both types of policies -- standards and incentives, or screens and magnets -- must be developed to assure the presence of good teachers in the classroom.

What to Read

Sykes, Gary, "Public Policy and the Problem of Teacher Quality: The Need for Screens and Magnets," in Shulman, Lee, (ed.), Handbook of Teaching and Policy. New York: Longman, Inc., 1983.

Vance, Victor S., and Phillip C. Schlechty, "The Structure of the Teaching Occupation and Characteristics of Teachers: A Sociological Interpretation." Washington, D.C.: The National Institute of Education, 1982.

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